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Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme
142nd meeting
Nairobi, 10 May 2018

Draft minutes of the 141st meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme, held on 20 February 2018

Agenda item 1

Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting was opened at 10.15 a.m. on Tuesday, 20 February 2018, by Mr. John Moreti, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations Environment Programme and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme.

2. The meeting was attended by 104 participants representing 75 members and two observer missions. The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Mr. Erik Solheim, participated via videoconference from New Delhi.

3. The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee: Mr. Rajesh Swami, Deputy High Commissioner and Deputy Permanent Representative of India; Jamal Abdullah Dulaimi, First Secretary and Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq; Mr. Ahmad Hafizuddin Zainal Abidin, Deputy Permanent Representative of Malaysia; Mr. Jabr bin Ali Hussein Al Hawashela Al Dosari, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Qatar; Ms. Amanda Mkhwanazi, Deputy Permanent Representative of South Africa; Ms. Pornprom Petklai Nihon, Deputy Permanent Representative of Thailand; and Ms. Phibby Awere Otaala, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Uganda.

4. He then bade farewell to the following departing members: Ms. Marcela Nicodemos, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil; Mr. Zaid Noori, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iraq; Mr. Mohammed Husham Malik Al-Fityan, Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq; Mr. Ahmad Fuad, Deputy Permanent Representative of Malaysia; Mr. Johan Nel, Deputy Permanent Representative of South Africa; and Mr. Nippon Rachawej, Minister Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative of Thailand.

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the agenda

5. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1).

6. At the suggestion of the Chair, the Committee agreed to consider agenda item 4 immediately after agenda item 1, and to take up agenda item 3 after consideration of agenda item 8.

Agenda item 3

Adoption of the draft report of the third meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives

7. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the draft report of the third meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, held from 29 November to 1 December 2017 (UNEP/CPR/141/2).

8. One representative asked whether in the future the reports of the Committee and Open-ended Committee meetings could be issued shortly after such meetings had been held, and whether there was a justification for the practice of referring to all speakers as "representatives", without identifying the country or group on whose behalf they were speaking.

9. With regard to the first question, the Chair said that time was needed to produce and clear meeting reports. With regard to the second question, he said that the issue required further discussion.

10. The Committee adopted the report on the basis of the draft report (UNEP/CPR/141/2).

Agenda item 4

Report of the Executive Director

11. In his oral briefing, which he delivered via videoconference, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme drew attention to the document entitled "Executive Director's progress update report to the Committee of Permanent Representatives", available on the website of the Committee. He then outlined a number of key activities undertaken by the secretariat since the previous meeting of the Committee.

12. The third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, held from 4 to 6 December 2017, had been a major success thanks in part to the selection by member States of an agenda focused on achieving a pollution-free planet, an issue on which all countries agreed on the need to take action. In order to ensure that the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, to be held in Nairobi from 11 to 15 March 2019, was even more successful than the third, the secretariat planned to engage with the bureaux of the Committee and the Assembly and to hold formal and informal consultations with member States to discuss lessons learned from the third session and to shape the agenda of the fourth session.

13. In the spirit of the "One United Nations" approach, the United Nations Environment Programme had signed agreements with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to help to move the climate agenda forward by engaging in advocacy work; with the World Trade Organization to address the links between the environment and trade, to save resources and to make environmental solutions more efficient; and with the World Health Organization to launch the most successful campaign possible to fight pollution, which was a major environmental and health issue.

14. The United Nations Environment Programme had also worked hard to engage with the private sector. Through its Finance Initiative, the organization had been working on the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative and was on the verge of releasing global guidelines on sustainable banking developed in collaboration with a number of large banks. The organization was also partnering with The Coca-Cola Company, which had promised to become a "zero waste" company worldwide; with BNP Paribas, which had promised to invest $10 billion in greening agriculture in India and Indonesia; with Rabobank, which aimed to make investments in green agriculture in Brazil and possibly elsewhere; with One97 Communications Limited, India's largest digital finance company, which had agreed to invest in public outreach and practical actions to fight pollution; and with Nornickel, which had large-scale mining operations in Norway and the Russian Federation, with the aim of helping the company to green its operations.

15. The organization had also been working with the Government of France and other member States in New York on the Global Pact for the Environment, proposed by French President, Mr. Emmanuel Macron, and for which it was expected to provide the secretariat for the pact negotiations. All the stakeholders agreed that the negotiating process should take place both in New York and Nairobi, bearing in mind that all countries had missions in New York, but not all were represented in Nairobi. The Executive Director encouraged representatives in Nairobi to convey their views on the proposed pact to their colleagues in New York.

16. The United Nations Environment Programme had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of India to hold the 2018 World Environment Day celebrations in India, and in December 2017, the Executive Director had attended a meeting in China on the country's Belt and Road Initiative, which, he said, was the largest investment initiative of its time, covering vast areas of the planet. The organization was part of a new global coalition called the Greening the Belt and Road Initiative, which would be launched in China in 2018 and sought to ensure that the Belt and Road Initiative supported investments in solar and wind energy and green infrastructure projects. A number of member States, as well as coalition partners such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Resources Institute, would be invited to the launch event.

17. The organization had started consultations regarding a paper entitled *Understanding Circular Economy in Africa*, which sets out its strategy to improve its work in Africa, focusing on issues discussed by the African Union, such as how to use the environment as a beacon for job creation; how to assist Africa in successfully moving towards a circular economy; how to fight pollution in a rapidly urbanizing context, for instance through better mass transit systems and planning; how to protect wildlife and nature without hindering economic growth; and environmental security.

18. During the fifty-fourth Munich Security Conference, held from 16 to 18 February 2018, in response to an earlier request from the Conference, the United Nations Environment Programme had made a presentation on the role of climate change and environmental degradation in amplifying and multiplying conflicts, and it expected to continue to work with the Conference in the future.

19. In closing, the Executive Director invited member States to submit nominations for the positions of Deputy Executive Director and Director of the organization's New York office, which were now open as a result of the regular rotation of staff, and for other positions that would soon become available, including those of Director of the Europe Office, Director of the Ecosystems Division and Director of the Corporate Services Division. He then announced the appointments of Mr. Sami Dimassi, current acting Director of the Corporate Services Division, as Director of the West Asia Office; Mr. Gary Lewis as acting Director of the Programme and Policy Division; Mr. Iyad Abumoghli, former Director of the West Asia Office, as special adviser on faith-based initiatives; and Mr. Jan Dusik, current acting Director of the Europe Office, as principal adviser on Arctic and Antarctic issues.

20. In the ensuing discussion, representatives expressed appreciation to the Executive Director for his report and oral briefing and for participating in the current meeting via videoconference. One representative expressed the hope that the secretariat would schedule future Committee meetings in a way that enabled the Executive Director to attend them in person thereby engaging more fully with the Committee.

21. Expressing appreciation for the transparent manner in which information was being transmitted to the Committee, one representative encouraged the Executive Director to continue that approach. Another representative said that the report and the activities described therein showed that the global dialogue on the role of the environment in achieving common goals was shifting, signalling that there was no need to be motivated by the environment in order to want to protect it.

22. Two representatives requested the Executive Director to provide information on ways in which the various global initiatives of the United Nations Environment Programme described in his report were being integrated into, and supported the implementation of, the organization's programme of work and management theories.

23. Regarding the third session of the Environment Assembly, all those who spoke said that it had been a success. They highlighted the political determination shown by member States, which, combined with the hard work of the secretariat and the leadership of the Environment Assembly President and Bureau and of the Committee Bureau, had led to the adoption of a ministerial declaration and eleven resolutions with the aim of achieving a pollution-free planet. Several representatives said that member States must engage constructively in the preparations for the fourth session of the Assembly, including by selecting a theme for the session.

24. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, offered to support the Executive Director in developing a plan for the implementation of the ministerial declaration adopted by the Environment Assembly at its third session, which the Assembly had requested the Executive Director to develop in consultation with the Committee, as well as the programme of work and budget for 2020–2021. The programme of work would be the first to be developed under the leadership of the Executive Director and would present an opportunity for him to reflect in it his vision for the United Nations Environment Programme under the guidance of member States.

25. Drawing attention to a note by the secretariat under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1) on the implementation plan for Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, asked the secretariat to produce similar implementation updates and plans for all the resolutions adopted by the Environment Assembly at its third session, expressing the view that such updates and plans would help the United Nations Environment Programme to improve the implementation of, and follow-up on, the resolutions and decisions of the Assembly.

26. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed concern that very limited information on the involvement of the United Nations Environment Programme in the wider United Nations reform process had been provided in the Executive Director's report and requested that additional information on that issue be transmitted to the Committee to enable member States to provide inputs to the process. Another representative asked about the role of the organization in the reform of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. Yet another requested the secretariat to brief the Committee on how the organization and management reform of the organization fitted into the wider reform of the United Nations.

27. With regard to the financial performance of the United Nations Environment Programme, one representative speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that additional information was needed to help member States to understand how different sources of revenue were being used to implement the resolutions and decisions of the governing body of the organization. The same representative commended the Executive Director on the launch of the new United Nations Environment Programme website, but asked him to reinstate the previous address for the site, www.unep.org, which he said was shorter and easier to memorize than the new address.

28. Regarding the proposed Global Pact for the Environment, one representative asked about the role of the United Nations Environment Programme in the negotiations on the pact and the meaning of several terms and phrases contained in a draft resolution on the pact. Another representative expressed appreciation to the secretariat for its efforts to enable the Committee to participate in the negotiations, but said that the United Nations Environment Programme should play a significant role in the negotiations given that the organization had initiated and serviced most of the existing multilateral environmental agreements.

29. With regard to staffing issues, one representative encouraged the secretariat to consider recruiting a permanent legal adviser specializing in the rules and regulations of the United Nations. Drawing attention to the second United Nations staff survey, which she said had not been flattering for the United Nations, she asked the Executive Director to share his plans for improving work satisfaction among the staff of the United Nations Environment Programme.

30. Several representatives expressed appreciation to the United Nations Environment Programme for activities undertaken in their countries. The representative of India said that the World Environment Day celebrations in his country would not be merely symbolic but would focus on India's mission to address environmental challenges, including plastic pollution, on which the celebrations would focus.

31. Responding to questions from representatives, the Executive Director offered to provide information on how the initiatives undertaken by the United Nations Environment Programme fitted into its programme of work. As for the programme of work for 2020–2021, he said that the secretariat would provide an update to the Committee on the drafting process in the coming weeks.

32. Concerning the dissatisfaction of staff reported in the United Nations staff survey, the Executive Director said that the solution lay in reforming the United Nations so that it was much simpler, more efficient and less bureaucratic and became a place where people were proud to work.

33. With regard to the proposed Global Pact for the Environment, he said that the decision regarding the role of the United Nations Environment Programme in the pact negotiations would not be taken in Nairobi, so he encouraged Committee members to engage with their colleagues in New York to ensure that Nairobi would play a major role in the negotiating process.

34. Lastly, with regard to the comment that the tone of the global conversation on the role of the environment in achieving common goals was changing, he said that the key to effecting such a change and achieving common objectives was to use wording that everyone could understand, to be people-centred and solution-oriented and to fully integrate environment and development.

35. In addition to answering questions from the floor, the Executive Director invited the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to meet with him to discuss the possibility of sending a United Nations Environment Programme technical mission to assess the environmental

situation of that country. Stressing that the Government of China had drastically increased its financial contribution and was providing eleven junior professional officers to the United Nations Environment Programme, the Executive Director then invited middle-income countries to follow China's example and contribute at least one junior professional officer to the Programme.

36. The Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, said that the current draft resolution on the proposed Global Pact for the Environment had been compiled by legal experts for general discussion and did not constitute a draft text for negotiation by member States. He further clarified that member States would have an opportunity to review and agree on the text to be used for negotiations.

Agenda item 5

Implementation of the programme of work and budget and of Environment Assembly resolutions

37. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to several notes by the secretariat under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1): a note on a new consolidated reporting tool to the Committee of Permanent Representatives setting out a proposal for reporting by the secretariat to the Committee on the implementation of the programme of work and budget of the United Nations Environment Programme, which had been drafted by the secretariat taking into account the outcomes of a subcommittee meeting held on 6 February 2018, with the objective of helping the Committee to fulfil its mandate of overseeing the implementation of the programme of work and budget, incorporating seven additional documents, each of which provided an overview of the project portfolio for each of the seven subprogrammes of the United Nations Environment Programme for the period 2018–2021; a note by the secretariat on upcoming milestones on biodiversity; and a note by the secretariat on an implementation plan for Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics.

38. Mr. Thiaw then outlined the main elements of the proposed consolidated reporting tool, which, he said, sought to deliver better reports that responded to the needs of member States. The proposed reporting tool would encompass quarterly reports containing three sections: a policy update describing policy changes and developments, reforms and decisions made by the parties to international environmental treaties and international conferences on the environment; a programme update providing updates on each subprogramme to enable member States to see trends, challenges and opportunities and to provide guidance to the secretariat on how to address them; and a financial and human resources update with information on the financial and human resources situation of the United Nations Environment Programme, including information on the recruitment of staff financed from both budgetary and extrabudgetary resources.

39. The proposed quarterly reports would also provide information on the implementation of Environment Assembly resolutions, which would become more robust over time, and on challenges experienced by the secretariat in the implementation of the programme of work. If member States agreed to the proposed consolidated reporting tool, the new quarterly reports would replace the current Executive Director progress update reports to the Committee, since the former would cover all the issues currently included in the latter.

40. Turning to the note by the secretariat on upcoming milestones on biodiversity under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1), Mr. Thiaw said that it highlighted biodiversity-related events that would take place between 2018 and 2020 and had been prepared in response to Environment Assembly resolution 3/2 on pollution mitigation by mainstreaming biodiversity into key sectors.

41. Subsequently, Mr. Habib El-Habr, Coordinator of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, provided a summary of the implementation plan set out under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1) in the note by the secretariat on an implementation plan for Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics.

42. Ms. Anne Lemore, Chief of Staff of the United Nations Environment Programme, then provided updates on the management reform and other reform efforts of the Programme, and on the secretariat's activities related to the strategic management of human resources.

43. With regard to the reform issue, Ms. Lemore said that the secretariat was focused on how the organization could contribute to two strands of the United Nations reform process being led by the Secretary-General, namely the reform of the United Nations development system and the management reform, and on aligning its reform efforts with those of the United Nations in New York.

44. Concerning the reform of the United Nations development system, representatives of the New York office of the United Nations Environment Programme were engaged in discussions on that issue, which were centred on how to ensure that the entities of the United Nations worked as "One United Nations" and on the role of resident coordinators, regional commissions and other stakeholders in achieving that objective.

45. As for the management reform, as an entity of the United Nations Secretariat, any decisions taken by member States in New York would be binding on the United Nations Environment Programme, so the secretariat was following the process in New York very closely in order to ensure that the management reform efforts of the Programme were in line with decisions made in New York.

46. The management reform focused on three key elements discussed in the last paragraph of the summary of the September 2017 report by the Secretary-General entitled "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all" (A/72/492), which Ms. Lemore said was the basis of the management reforms currently under discussion in New York. Those three elements, she went on, were decentralization, including through the delegation of authority and stronger regional presence; enhanced accountability and transparency to achieve programme delivery and mandate implementation; and simplification and a reduction of bureaucracy in order to focus on achieving real world impacts.

47. In line with that overall approach, the secretariat had established four teams or processes to look at different areas of the reform agenda. The first team was being led by the Director of Corporate Services and the Chief of Staff and was focused on enhancing the internal accountability structure of the United Nations Environment Programme to strengthen its regional presence and programme delivery, for instance by rebalancing the relationship between regional and division directors and by streamlining the budget process to, for example, allocate funds directly to the divisions and regional offices for the implementation of the programme of work. The second process was focused on the simplification of processes to enhance the efficiency of the Programme. The secretariat had set up an online tool on the Intranet and created a very small internal reform advisory committee made up of non-senior staff in order to collect the views of staff on how simplification could be achieved. The staff had made a set of recommendations related to travel, recruitment, procurement, consultancies and programme design and implementation, which senior management was examining in order to determine which of them could be implemented in Nairobi and which could be shared with the New York office for consideration. The third group, called the Country Presence Committee, was being led by the Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific and was looking at how the regional, subregional and country presence of the Programme could be strengthened. The fourth and last group, led by the Deputy Executive Director, was focused on ensuring that all the reforms undertaken in Nairobi were fully aligned with the United Nations system-wide reform.

48. With regard to the management of human resources, which Ms. Lemore said was probably the most challenging task of the United Nations because the rules were extremely constraining, the United Nations Environment Programme was keeping in mind that the second highest priority of the Secretary-General was achieving gender parity in the United Nations system at all levels by 2028, and at the senior leadership level by 2021. An analysis of the Programme revealed large gender gaps at the P-4, P-5 and D-1 levels, so proactive steps must be taken to meet the gender targets and benchmarks set by the Secretary-General. If no progress was achieved by the end of 2019, the authority to recruit staff at the failing level would be taken away from the United Nations Environment Programme and passed on to human resources colleagues at the Secretariat headquarters in New York. In addition to gender, the Programme was taking into account the principles of geographical distribution and mobility in the management of its human resources, particularly with regard to senior staff appointments.

49. In closing, Ms. Lemore listed several vacant positions that had been or would soon be advertised. She also said that the secretariat was exploring options for hiring a permanent senior legal adviser, including by pooling resources with other organizations to have a common adviser, stressing that the secretariat was of the view that the support of a legal adviser during the third session of the Environment Assembly had been critical to the success of the session.

50. Before opening the floor for comments, the Chair said that in April 2018 the secretariat would hold a special briefing session on the management reform.

51. In the discussion that followed, representatives thanked the secretariat for the documents and information presented.

52. Many representatives welcomed the proposed consolidated reporting tool discussed under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1), suggesting that more concise and readable reports would help the Committee to fulfil its oversight role, increase transparency and reduce the burden on both the secretariat and the Committee. One representative suggested that the consolidated reports should include information on the impact of the global initiatives of which the United Nations Environment Programme was a part and the impacts of those initiatives on the programme of work.

53. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the proposed tool was a step in the right direction and a good basis for discussion, and suggested that an ad hoc working group be established to develop it. He also suggested that the new quarterly reports should not increase the burden of reporting but build on available information to regularly update the Committee on the implementation of the programme of work and of Environment Assembly resolutions, including how the activities undertaken during each reporting period and the financial and human resources allocated to such activities had contributed to the objectives set out in the programme of work, as well as resource mobilization. He further suggested that the proposed quarterly reports should not compromise the well-established results-based reports of the United Nations Environment Programme, but that the frequency of such results-based reports, which were labour-intensive, should perhaps be reconsidered.

54. One representative asked if the proposal to replace the regular updates by the Executive Director to the Committee with the new consolidated reports would mean a lesser degree of participation by the Executive Director in the work of the Committee, suggesting that such engagement needed to increase.

55. One representative said that the new quarterly reports should be circulated at least two weeks prior to Committee meetings to allow representatives to consult with their capitals on the reports. Another representative suggested that the secretariat produce a technical report for capitals and a simplified report for the Committee outlining what the secretariat was seeking from member States.

56. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested the Executive Director to provide to the Committee without delay detailed written information on the financial allocations from the Environment Fund and extrabudgetary resources, stressing that such information had been requested by the Open-ended Committee at its third meeting and had not yet been provided. He then expressed concern about the financial situation of the process to produce the sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6), which he said was one of the flagship reports of the United Nations Environment Programme.

57. Another representative requested the secretariat to brief member States, in either a Committee or a subcommittee meeting, on how the resources of the organization were being allocated, and in particular on the proportion of resources going to the programme of work. While recognizing that the allocation of resources to priorities outside the programme of work was necessary, she suggested that it was nevertheless important that the secretariat discuss resource allocation priorities with the Committee.

58. Regarding the seven project portfolios for the period 2018–2021, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested the secretariat to brief the Committee on how the mandates set out in Environment Assembly resolutions were embedded in the foreseen projects listed in the portfolios.

59. With regard to the implementation plan for Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics discussed under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1), one representative said that she was encouraged by the proposal to include major groups and stakeholders in the ad hoc open-ended expert group that would examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics, and to invite such groups and stakeholders to submit position papers.

60. Another representative said that the implementation plan would serve to comprehensively implement resolution 3/7, including through work of the United Nations Environment Programme in supporting the development of new regional action plans and the revision of existing plans, on the basis of a stocktaking exercise; the creation of a tool to enable member States and stakeholders to share information on their implementation of the marine litter-related resolutions of the Environment Assembly; and the establishment of a process to convene the ad hoc open-ended expert group called for in resolution 3/7, which, she said, should be an open and inclusive intergovernmental process that resulted in member State commitments that would take the agenda forward and lead to tangible results.

61. Also referring to the implementation plan for resolution 3/7, another representative requested the secretariat to provide information on progress achieved by the United Nations Environment Programme in the prioritization of actions to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics; specific current and planned activities regarding regional action plans and the provision of technical, financial and other support to member States in the implementation of paragraphs 4 (b) and 4 (h) of resolution 3/7; capacity-building activities carried out to help countries in developing new policies, regulatory frameworks and measures for the prevention and management of marine litter and microplastics; and progress achieved in the implementation of the policy-relevant recommendations presented by the Executive Director at the second session of the Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA.2/5). She further requested the United Nations Environment Programme, in its capacity as the world's leading voice for the environment, to develop campaigns and other mechanisms to raise public and private sector awareness of the importance of reducing marine plastic pollution, and to undertake plans, projects and campaigns to ensure that the key sectors listed in paragraph 9 of resolution 3/7 took action to reduce marine pollution. Lastly, she suggested that the four discussion papers to be considered by the ad hoc working expert group at its first meeting should be submitted at least one month in advance of the meeting so as to give participants enough time to review them.

62. With regard to the note by the secretariat on upcoming milestones on biodiversity under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1), the representative of Colombia drew attention to the sixth session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services to be held in Medellin, Colombia, from 18 to 24 March 2018.

63. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed concern regarding the lack of progress achieved in the implementation of resolutions and decisions of the governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme, noting that many remained unimplemented or partially implemented and that no platform existed for member States to follow up on their implementation. He requested the secretariat to develop a robust implementation plan for all such resolutions and decisions, setting out specific timelines and milestones, and to create an online platform to enable member States to monitor their implementation.

64. Another representative suggested that the secretariat develop an implementation plan for all Environment Assembly resolutions which would include activities to be undertaken by the Executive Director.

65. With regard to the management reform, one representative asked if there was any coordination regarding the reform between the United Nations Environment Programme and other Nairobi-based entities, and suggested that a direct line of communication between the Committee and the four teams that had been established to examine different areas of the management reform agenda should be created so that the Committee could provide input into their work and fulfil its oversight role.

66. Two representatives said that they looked forward to receiving detailed information on the nature of the reforms and their impact on the United Nations Environment Programme, with one suggesting that the Committee should be fully informed of such issues not only through meetings and briefings, but also through simple reports.

67. With regard to the management of human resources, one representative said that it was important to consider the principle of geographical balance in the hiring process in order to ensure that the United Nations did not become a "North club". Another representative said that achieving regional balance and effective mandate delivery and maintaining staff morale were all key management objectives.

68. On hiring a legal adviser, one representative expressed support for the idea of advertising a permanent legal adviser position and making the adviser available to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the United Nations Office at Nairobi. Another representative expressed appreciation to the Chief of Staff for her willingness to think creatively and explore ways to hire a permanent senior legal adviser to support the United Nations Environment Programme.

69. A number of representatives requested the Executive Director to provide details on staffing and restructuring, with one saying that such details were required for the Committee to perform its oversight role. One requested the secretariat to provide information on staffing developments over the previous two years in the divisions, regional offices, Executive Office, missions and duty stations of the United Nations Environment Programme around the world, so that the Committee could assess the current human resources situation of the organization.

70. The Committee took note of the documents presented and requested the secretariat to convene an informal subcommittee meeting to discuss and provide feedback to the secretariat on the proposed consolidated reporting tool discussed under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/141/1).

Agenda item 6

Assessment of the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

71. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a document entitled "Lessons learned from the third United Nations Environment Assembly and the way forward towards the fourth session", which had been compiled by the secretariat taking into account comments from member States made during a subcommittee meeting held on 6 February 2018, as well as written inputs submitted thereafter by individual member States and regional and political groups. Noting that the bureaux of the Committee and the Environment Assembly would review the document at a joint meeting on 27 February 2018, he invited the Committee at the current meeting to provide feedback on the document to enable the secretariat to revise it further before the joint bureaux meeting.

72. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives expressed appreciation to the secretariat for the document on lessons learned and to those who had contributed to making the third session of the Environment Assembly a success.

73. With regard to lessons learned from the third session, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the secretariat should undertake further work on the "group/delegation" registration option of the online registration system used at the third session in order to facilitate group registrations, stressing that in many cases the registration of an entire delegation was carried out by a single officer. He stressed that no more than two negotiating sessions should be held in parallel at any given time so that small delegations could participate fully in the negotiations, and that flexibility was needed with regard to the late submission of draft resolutions to be considered at sessions of the Environment Assembly, bearing in mind that the deadlines for submissions were voluntary and that later submissions were sometimes justified and were in line with the rules of procedure of the Assembly.

74. On the deadlines for submission of draft resolutions, one representative said that setting such deadlines was crucial to ensuring that member States were able to consider all the resolutions prior to the commencement of the fourth session of the Environment Assembly. Stressing that the loose political agreements currently in place did not appear to be working, another representative said that it was perhaps time to make the deadlines binding, and to consider asking the secretariat to revise the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly to assess whether they were sufficiently robust.

75. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, suggested that the fourth session of the Environment Assembly should continue to focus on consensus; be relevant to other international processes related to the environment within and outside the United Nations system, including the high-level political forum on sustainable development; and be preceded by an active intersessional preparatory process. He urged the secretariat to ensure that the preparatory process was transparent and inclusive, to maintain close contact with non-resident representatives on the process and to provide periodic reports to the Committee on preparations for the fourth session. In closing, he expressed a willingness to engage with the secretariat on ideas for ensuring that all developing countries, regardless of their classification in other processes, could actively participate in the preparatory process and in the fourth session itself.

76. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, suggested that, on the basis of the document under consideration and member State discussions, a set of recommendations for the fourth session of the Assembly be elaborated and agreed upon during the joint retreat of the bureaux scheduled for 22 and 23 March 2018.

77. One representative said that the success of the third session had been the product of the adoption by the secretariat and member States, following a less successful second session, of new models for the preparatory process; cooperation between the two bureaux; and decision-making and consensus-building around the ministerial declaration, suggesting that those models, which embraced transparency, inclusiveness and consensus-building, should be further strengthened.

78. Speaking on behalf of her Government and the presidency of the third session of the Environment Assembly, the representative of Costa Rica offered to share the lessons learned at the session with the presidency of the fourth session. She stressed that the adoption of a strong ministerial declaration at the third session, which had been possible owing to a participatory, inclusive and

transparent process and the support of the two bureaux, had been a major achievement, and she urged the Committee to work with the Executive Director on an implementation plan for the declaration in order to make it action-oriented.

79. One representative highlighted as lessons learned from the third session the need for greater coordination between the secretariat and member States with regard to Environment Assembly session events, including side events, and the need for increased engagement between member States and stakeholders. Referring to the document on lessons learned, the representative requested the secretariat to explain how the impact of the voluntary pledges made during the third session — 1.4 billion people worldwide breathing cleaner air according to the document — had been calculated; whether the regional ministerial meetings discussed in the document had been budgeted for and their cost implications; and why there was a reference in the document to the need to mobilize additional resources, since it was her understanding that the convening of Environment Assembly sessions was part of the core mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme and should thus be financed from the core budget of the organization. Limited resources would be better spent, she said, on producing the best possible Global Environment Outlook report rather than on producing a report on the theme of the fourth session, and it was more important to implement Environment Assembly resolutions than to adopt ministerial declarations.

80. Several representatives suggested that the practice of holding the meetings of the Open-ended Committee and the sessions of the Environment Assembly back to back should continue, expressing the view that back-to-back sessions made it easier for non-resident representatives to participate in the negotiations and facilitated the process. Others said that the Open-ended Committee meetings should be held several weeks before Assembly sessions, suggesting that the cycle of Assembly meetings had been adjusted and things should return to normal at the fourth session. back-to-back meetings could come at the expense of the substance of Assembly resolutions, given that time was needed to obtain the support of capitals on key resolution provisions, and holding back-to-back meetings was a challenge for small delegations.

81. With regard to logistics, one representative proposed that the secretariat notify participants whenever documents had been uploaded on the Environment Assembly website, and that it simplify the registration process. Another representative suggested that the secretariat explore ways of ensuring improved attendance at the Assembly sessions in which national statements were delivered, and of avoiding late-night meetings.

82. One representative asked the secretariat to identify dates for the subcommittee meetings to be held during the last quarter of 2018 and the start of 2019, stressing that it was important to hold formal and informal meetings in the lead-up to the fourth session in order to negotiate the Assembly resolutions and the ministerial declaration well in advance of the fourth session.

83. In closing, the Chair said that the secretariat would revise the document on lessons learned in the light of the discussion at the current meeting and any written comments submitted thereafter and present the revised document for consideration at the joint meeting of the bureaux on 27 February 2018. With regard to the organization of the intersessional process, he said that the Committee would need to discuss the matter further in consultation with the Bureau of the Environment Assembly.

Agenda item 7

Consideration of selection criteria and possible themes for the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

84. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a note by the secretariat on selection criteria and possible themes for the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, which had been presented to the subcommittee at a meeting held on 15 February 2018 and had also been considered by the Bureau of the Environment Assembly on 30 January 2018. The document, he said, proposed two possible themes for the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, namely, sustainable consumption and production, and food and nature/biodiversity.

85. The Chair further noted that, during the subcommittee meeting of 15 February 2018, the group of African countries and another group of countries had expressed support for a third possible theme concerning innovative solutions for the environment. The secretariat had therefore been asked to revise the note taking into account the subcommittee discussions and the discussion at the current meeting and to submit the revised note for consideration at the joint meeting of the bureaux on 27 February 2018. The Environment Assembly Bureau was required to take a decision on the theme of the fourth session, in consultation with the Committee, no later than 31 March 2018. It was to be

hoped, therefore, that the joint bureaux retreat, to be held in Nairobi on 22 and 23 March 2018, would reach consensus on the theme.

86. Before inviting comments from the floor, the Chair invited Mr. Ado Lõhmus, Special Envoy of the President of the Assembly, to deliver a message on behalf of Mr. Siim Kiisler, President of the United Nations Environment Assembly and Minister for the Environment of Estonia, and Mr. Thiaw, to provide an overview of the two possible themes proposed by the secretariat for the fourth session.

87. In his remarks, Mr. Lõhmus said that the President and his team were fully committed to addressing the lessons learned from the third session of the Environment Assembly, which had set a very high standard of success for the fourth session. He stressed that they would adopt a solution-oriented approach by focusing on acute environmental problems that were easy to communicate and could lead to citizen action, and that they would embrace the principles of inclusiveness by engaging with the private sector and civil society to seek their input and to raise the visibility of the Assembly; of cooperation, between member States, the bureaux and the secretariat, New York and Nairobi colleagues, and the Environment Assembly and key bodies such as the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and the high-level political forum on sustainable development; and of ownership, by maintaining the consensus-based atmosphere that had prevailed at the third session.

88. With regard to the ministerial outcome document, Mr. Lõhmus said that before working on a zero draft of the document, it was important to discuss a follow-up mechanism for its implementation. As for the theme of the fourth session, he said that it should focus on the better use of resources, including natural, financial and temporal resources, and suggested that member States must work efficiently in the preparatory process and discuss solutions to acute environmental problems in order to make the best use of the time available in the lead-up to the fourth session.

89. In his presentation, the Deputy Executive Director said that the secretariat had identified "food and nature/biodiversity" and "sustainable consumption and production" as two possible themes for the fourth session, taking into account the suggestion by member States that the theme should resonate with the general public; appeal to decision makers; enhance partnerships with stakeholders, including member States, the private sector and civil society; and help the United Nations Environment Programme to move forward into its next programme of work.

90. The first proposed theme dealt with a topic that was of great importance to the world, given the need to feed an additional two billion people by 2050 without harming the planet. That challenge would require dealing with issues such as the use of pesticides and fertilizers; making agriculture much more efficient to prevent deforestation and degradation of key resources such as freshwater and soils; protecting pollinators; and addressing non-agricultural food production, such as the production of fish and seafood and forest products. Ministers at the fourth session of the Environment Assembly needed to be empowered to take action in order to feed the world in an environmentally sound manner, using scientific reports produced by bodies such as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity initiative and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and to build partnerships with United Nations and other entities working on, or interested in, food-related issues. If tackled properly, he said, the theme would have a huge impact on the world and compel different actors to come together to address it.

91. The second proposed theme was equally topical, since the projected population of nine billion people by 2050 would have a higher income and a higher footprint on the planet than the current population. Ensuring that people's consumption was sustainable was imperative in order to ensure that food, minerals and other resources on which the economy depended were not depleted. This would require a move away from linear economies – which were premised on the extraction, exploitation, usage and throwing away of resources, were not sustainable in the context of a growing population and shrinking resources and could be expected to lead to more conflicts over access to natural resources – to circular economies. The theme of sustainable consumption and production also offered enormous potential for partnerships, with actors such as the World Economic Forum, entities working on the circular economy and a range of United Nations entities, and the use of scientific reports such as those produced by the International Resource Panel.

92. In the ensuing discussion, representatives expressed appreciation to the secretariat for the note on selection criteria and possible themes for the fourth session and to the Deputy Executive Director for his oral presentation on the two themes described therein.

93. With regard to the selection criteria set out in the note, two representatives, speaking on behalf of groups of countries, suggested that there was no need to further discuss the criteria, which one said was useful but should not be seen as exhaustive, and proposed that member States focus their efforts on discussing and agreeing on the theme itself.

94. Noting that the United Nations Environment Programme and many other organizations were already paying attention to the two themes proposed by the secretariat, one representative expressed support for the theme of innovation, which she said was action-oriented, focused on solutions and could encompass tools and approaches, such as resource efficiency, waste reduction, adaptive management and the integration of environmental economic and social data platforms, to tackle issues discussed in the sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook report.

95. While noting that all the proposed themes merited consideration, one representative expressed support for a theme focused on the nexus between food production and biodiversity, stressing that meeting the international demand for food and ensuring biodiversity protection were both key for human well-being but were often seen as two competing goals.

96. Another representative expressed support for the theme of sustainable consumption and production, stressing that it had global reach and was of interest to all countries and regions; it encompassed a wide range of environmental and socioeconomic topics and could help to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 12 and thereby improve quality of life for all; it was connected to the objective of the third session of achieving a pollution-free planet; and it would enable the participation of the private sector and civil society, given the shared responsibility among different stakeholders in sustainable consumption and production. She then suggested that the secretariat improve the outline of the goals of each of the proposed themes in the revised note.

97. With regard to the proposed new theme of innovation for the environment, one representative said that it was an overarching topic, of interest to all regions and countries, under which specific focus areas could be identified.

98. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed support for further exploring the two themes proposed by the secretariat, which, he said, presented a risk of overlaps with existing work but could be framed in a way that added value to such work. He said that the new proposed theme of innovation to be included in the revised note of the secretariat also deserved consideration, but he expressed concern that the theme could be framed either too narrowly, for instance as a tool for furthering the sustainable consumption and production or the sustainable agriculture agendas, or too loosely, given that environmental innovation could be linked to a very wide range of topics.

99. A number of representatives suggested that the theme of innovation could be framed in a way that accommodated the two themes proposed by the secretariat and any challenges identified by member States as critical, for instance by focusing on innovation for sustainable consumption and for the protection of biodiversity in food production.

100. One representative drew attention to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme entitled *Frontiers 2017: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern*, which he said could help member States to set an overarching theme for the fourth session. He requested the secretariat to make a synthesis of the report available to member States.

101. In closing, the Chair encouraged member States to engage in informal consultations on the theme in order to make a strong recommendation to the Bureau of the Environment Assembly. He said that the secretariat would revise its note on possible themes for the fourth session in order to include the three themes proposed to date, and present the revised note for consideration by the two bureaux at their joint meeting on 27 February 2018, on which he would brief member States at the subcommittee meeting scheduled for 15 March 2018.

Agenda item 8

Preparation of the contribution of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

102. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a note by the secretariat on the process of contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the high-level political forum on sustainable development (UNEP/CPR/141/8). He said that the note had been prepared by the secretariat in response to Environment Assembly resolution 3/3, in which the Assembly had committed to conveying the main messages of its sessions to the high-level political forum on sustainable development and agreed to provide substantive inputs to the annual forum meetings.

The forum would meet in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018, and it was critical that it consider the outcomes of the third session of the Environment Assembly.

103. The Deputy Executive Director explained that the document (UNEP/CPR/141/8) provided an update on the process and timelines set up by the secretariat to provide inputs to the high-level political forum for its meeting to be held in July 2018. In response to a letter from the President of the Economic and Social Council to the President of the Environment Assembly requesting him to provide those inputs by 27 April 2018, the United Nations Environment Programme was preparing an inputs document to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council. The secretariat would share a draft version of the document with the President of the Environment Assembly by 2 March 2018, and, after revising the document in the light of comments received from the President, it would submit a revised draft to the joint bureaux ahead of its retreat of 22 and 23 March 2018. The Committee, the bureaux and member States would then have the opportunity to provide comments on the revised draft by 6 April 2018. In addition to that written input, the United Nations Environment Programme was working with colleagues in New York to ensure that the President of the Assembly was able to participate in, and deliver an oral presentation to, the high-level political forum at its meeting in July 2018.

104. Drawing attention to paragraph 7 of the note, which set out timelines for the preparation of the written input to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council, the representative of the secretariat noted that the Committee would have the opportunity to review the document and give its final approval thereon at its 142nd meeting, to be held in April 2018.

105. In the discussion that followed, representatives expressed appreciation to the secretariat and to the Deputy Executive Director for the document and information provided, with many expressing support for the proposed way forward and for giving the President of the Environment Assembly the opportunity to deliver a statement to the high-level political forum and thereby increase the visibility of the Assembly.

106. With regard to the timelines proposed for the production of the document to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council, several representatives, including two speaking on behalf of groups of countries, suggested that the draft version of the document be shared with the subcommittee prior to the joint bureaux retreat of 22 and 23 March 2018.

107. As for the document itself, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that it should focus on the central theme of the July 2018 forum meeting and the Sustainable Development Goals to be discussed at the meeting, in the template proposed by the Economic and Social Council.

108. Another representative urged the United Nations Environment Programme to produce a document not longer than one page that provided the specific information that the Economic and Social Council had requested, stressing that the Programme was not a central concern of the high-level political forum. Another representative said that the document must be concise and reflect the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

109. Thanking representatives for their comments, the Deputy Executive Director clarified that the document to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council would be submitted not on behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme but on behalf of the Environment Assembly, which was a unique body with universal membership that had the legitimacy to deliver a message on the environmental dimension of sustainable development to the high-level political forum. It was critical therefore that representatives provide comments on the document and engage with their counterparts in New York in order to ensure that the President of the Assembly was allowed to deliver a message to the forum.

110. The Chair said that the secretariat would present to the subcommittee, between 13 and 15 March 2018, the draft document to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council, revise the document in the light of the discussions of the subcommittee and present it for consideration at the joint retreat of the bureaux on 22 and 23 March 2018.

Agenda item 9

Report of the subcommittee

111. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a document entitled "Chair's report of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives" (UNEP/CPR/141/9). He noted that since the 140th meeting of the Committee, eight subcommittee meetings, five secretariat briefing sessions, four informal consultations on resolutions decisions and two informal consultations on the ministerial outcome document of the fourth session of the Environment Assembly had been held. The

secretariat had also provided several targeted briefings to member States on various topics, the details of which were provided in the above-mentioned document.

112. Stressing that two agenda items of the current meeting had overlapped with two agenda items of the subcommittee meeting held on 15 February 2018, and that there was limited value in repeating statements already made at the subcommittee meeting, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, suggested that in the future the secretariat should present a detailed summary of subcommittee meetings to the Committee and that member States should be invited to only provide comments on the way forward for items already discussed by the subcommittee.

113. The representative of the secretariat said that the secretariat strived to ensure that a detailed report of every subcommittee and Bureau meeting was produced by the rapporteur. Future subcommittee reports could therefore provide links to the summaries of each individual subcommittee meeting.

114. The Committee took note of the report.

Agenda item 10

Other matters

115. One representative requested that the secretariat make available the following documents to the Committee in order to enable the Committee to perform its oversight role: strategy on resource mobilization; stakeholder and private sector engagement strategies; strategy on communication and outreach, including outreach to non-resident missions; strategy on the regional and subregional presence of the United Nations Environment Programme; a list and an overview of all memorandums of understanding signed in 2017, and their financial implications; and information on the host country agreement with the Government of Kenya.

Agenda item 11

Closure of the meeting

116. The meeting was declared closed at 5.10 p.m. on Tuesday, 20 February 2018.